

Remarks of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
National Association of Community Health Centers Congressional Awards
Ceremony
Policy and Issues Forum
March 21, 2013

Thank you, Louise, for those kind words. It's a great honor to receive your 2013 Distinguished Community Health Champion Award.

I am pleased to be in the company of this evening's other awardees [Rep. Clyburn, Rep. Davis, Rep. Bilirakis, and Sen. Casey] and to celebrate the important work of the nation's health centers.

I have been working on health center issues for a long time now – since I was Chairman of the Health and the Environment Subcommittee in the 80's and 90's.

From visits to health centers in my district to meetings with Louise and others from the Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County, I know the critical role health centers play in the delivery of health care in California and across this country.

I know, too, that support for this program has always been bipartisan, and that's reflected tonight in your choice of honorees.

I would hope, then, that whatever differences Democrats and Republicans may have, our commitment to the Health Centers Program remains united and strong.

Lots has happened in Washington since we last met. Let me highlight just two developments that I am sure are top of mind for all of you:

First is the passage of the landmark health reform legislation -- the Affordable Care Act -- that will extend insurance coverage to an estimated 27 million Americans.

Health centers will play a key role in the law's success -- serving as the health homes for many of the newly-insured -- and continuing to be a safety net provider to those who remain in need of care.

I know you are already hard at work preparing for this role. And, undoubtedly, there will be bumps along the way. But working together, I am confident we can realize the ACA's goal of expanding access to affordable health care.

Second is the nation's so-called fiscal crisis and the current budget debate.

Everyone agrees we must take appropriate measures to ensure our country's financial stability.

But indiscriminate spending cuts -- and reductions in funding for effective programs like yours -- is not the way to do that.

Block granting Medicaid and shifting costs to states, providers, and patients is not the way to do that.

Turning Medicare into a voucher program is not the way to do that.

And repealing the Affordable Care Act -- or rejecting the law's Medicaid expansion, even as the federal government picks up virtually all of its cost -- is not the way to do that.

These measures would severely impact the ability for millions of Americans to secure health coverage and access needed health care.

As you well know, they would jeopardize your ability to serve over 22 million patients who rely on health centers for high-quality and cost-effective primary care.

And they undermine the expansion of health centers that would otherwise benefit millions of Americans who still go without routine care.

We simply cannot let that happen.

Your presence here in Washington this week could not be more timely. You remind policymakers from both parties what's at stake in the current budget talks and health reform implementation efforts.

And you make clear that the outcomes of these debates aren't a matter of fancy charts or artificial deadlines. Rather, they are a matter of our values as a nation.

I am privileged to work with you in helping to ensure that our most vulnerable Americans have access to care.

I am committed to stand with you to further this mission and to continue my support of health centers.

Thank you.